The School as a Moral Arena
Constitutive values and deliberation in Swedish curriculum practice

Katarina Norberg

Pedagogiska institutionen, Umeå universitet
Nr 73

Abstract

This thesis’ main theme is the relation between school practices and the constitutive values explicitly endorsed in the Swedish national curriculum. It consists of four articles. Article I examines the new educational circumstances in a multicultural society. It problematizes the school’s task to find a balance between contributing to a certain cultural consensus, the common and shared, and to increase the ability to live with a cultural multiplicity. The article addresses the need for intercultural education for the realisation of a democratic classroom. Article II addresses the challenge for schools to advocate constitutive values in a multicultural society. It problematizes the relation between the curriculum’s values, stipulated at central level, and their interpretation and implementation at local level, i.e., in the classroom. An action-research project in a Swedish school illustrates the teachers’ struggle to realize these values in daily practice. The project resulted in the teachers move from abstract to concrete discussions of the constitutive values, as well as changes in their daily practice. Overall, the paper focuses on possibilities for deliberation in a multicultural school. Article III highlights schooling as a moral practice. It builds on a field study which investigates the relation between the curriculum’s stipulated values and the enacted curriculum. Episodes of moral steering are presented together with the teachers’ subsequent evaluation of these incidents. These episodes suggest that insofar as individual beliefs and moment-by-moment responses may lead to actions with counteract constitutive values, moral practices must also be a deliberative practice where alternatives are weighed and courses of action are adopted. Article IV develops the discussion concerning the school as a moral arena. A short lunch episode from the school study illustrates the discrepancy between the curriculum’s constitutive values and their realization in practice. The paper suggests that episodes at the margins of school practices may be just as important to the moral curriculum of school as the knowledge-related elements conventionally deemed to be the core of the curriculum. In summary, the thesis demonstrates that the assignment to foster the coming citizens in a multicultural school is complex. Other values than those stipulated in the curriculum steer teachers’ actions. Moreover, it is a thorny mission to accomplish an equal school in an unequal society. Nonetheless, there is a need for awareness among pedagogues concerning the correspondence between societal values, the hierarchy of social groups, individual values, the curriculum’s values, and the teacher’s assignment. The curriculum’s values have to be taken into account just as well as individual attitudes, prejudices and taken-for-granted notions have to be clarified, confronted, defended or abandoned. Interpreting, internalising and applying democratic values in school is a never-ending process.

Key-words: Constitutive values, curriculum, moral, schooling, intercultural education, multicultural school,
Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been an interesting, challenging, developing, learning and, mostly, joyful journey through constitutive values, moral actions, and scientific theories. Yet, I have not travelled alone. Without fellow-passengers would this trip have been trickier and less fun. Therefore I would like to express my gratitude to all who have followed my work with support and encouragement.

First of all I would like to show appreciation to two colleagues who put me on the track: To Inger M. Andersson for involving me to many of her research projects. I was not always sure of what to do or how to do it when we commenced these projects, but our collaboration always ended up with new knowledge and insights and a taste for continuing the research path. Thank you Inger for being an inspiring mentor. The second starter was Sture Sjödin. Thank you Sture for helping me to realise that I actually wanted to commence the postgraduate studies. Thanks to you I didn’t miss the trip towards dissertation.

The Department of Education has offered beneficial conditions for doctoral studies such as it - and administrational support and reasonable teaching conditions. Many are the laughs I’ve shared with valued colleagues in the coffee room. Thank you all for a joyful and inspirational environment. A special thanks to Harrieth Allergren, Ethel Dahlgren, Eva Olofsson, Christina Segerholm and Lena Ålander for female support and informal chats. And, not to forget, thank you Marita Fransson, Ellinor Hansson and Anna Nilsson for having patience with my untidy office. Soon you will see the table-top, I promise.

Constructive critique has been important during the writing process. The members of the seminar group, managed by Jarl Backman, have given me helpful comments on my drafts. Thank you Elinor Adenling, Ulrika Haake, Mattias Johnsson, Peter Nilsson, Peter Nyström, Bertil Roos, Ulrika Widding and Margareta Wolf-Watz for beneficial critique in an enjoyable atmosphere. A special thanks to Ingrid Nilsson for sharing your competence with valuable comments when I finished my writing.

The Centre for Principal Development, managed by Olof Johansson and meritoriously administrated by Gunilla Lindström, has introduced me to the leadership field, and values and ethics in educational administration. Thank you all wonderful colleagues for learning discussions, inspiring challenges and many laughs. Being a part of the centre has also giving me the opportunity to present papers, and establish connections with researchers at international conferences. For that I am very grateful.

The thesis could not have been written without the study’s participating pedagogues. Thank you all skilled learners for letting me take part of the inner life of school, for fruitful discussions and for new insights in your daily struggle.

There has been a life outside the department. To family and dear friends: thank you all for support and joyous acclamations, for delicious dinners, good wine and a hint of the world outside discourses and social constructivism. Next dinner is on me.

Last, but foremost, my thanks go to David Hamilton, my supervisor. David has with a never-failing patience guided me through scientific and linguistic minefields. Thank you David for your critical but always supportive supervision, your genuine interest of my writing, your scientific competence, your humour and, as important, your encouragement when I despaired. I owe you many thanks.


Katarina Norberg
The School as a Moral Arena
Constitutive values and deliberation in Swedish curriculum practice

The thesis comprises the following articles:


All references to these articles will refer to this numbering.
Contents

**Prologue**  
How the research developed  
New insights  
With constitutive values towards equality  
Constitutive values vs reality  

**Conducting the study**  
Biography as social location  
Entering the field  
The study’s theoretical orientations  
The study’s purpose  
Method  
Analysis  

**Summary of the articles**  
I  Intercultural education and teacher education in Sweden  
II  The Constitutive Values of Swedish Schooling: a challenge to the inner life of schools  
III  Constitutive Values and Daily Practice in a Swedish School  
IV  Morality at the Margins – a silent dimension of teaching and learning  

**Concluding reflections**  
Epilogue  

References
Prologue

One Wednesday in September 2003 it was time to commence the last phase of my writing: the introductory chapter. It was a relief to see the end, I was enthusiastic to finish. The next day, a sunny September Thursday, the news reached me that the Swedish Foreign Minister had died after being stabbed in Stockholm. My enthusiasm evaporated. And, if that wasn’t enough, at the same day a five year-old girl was killed outside her pre-school and another sixteen-year old girl was found dead, strangled by a male friend. These perpetrators had once been young boys with dreams, hopes and other ambitions. Where did we go wrong?

The next couple of days, politicians from all parties emphasized that, united, we stand up for our democratic values, and defend Sweden as an open and human society. But, equally important, they also called attention to the fact that democracy should begin within ourselves. We create a democratic society collectively.

All citizens are commonly accountable for defending democracy, as parents, neighbours, fellow-beings, and professionals. Yet, there is one group of professionals who have such responsibility explicitly expressed in their assignment: those who work in pre-schools and schools, those who foster the citizenship of the coming generation.

As I listened to the politicians’ speeches, the motivation to keep on writing returned. This thesis, then, is about the Swedish national curriculum’s constitutive democratic values and their realisation in school practice. The importance of these values was, that September day, more apparent than ever.

Writing a thesis around a series of papers differs from writing a monograph. Each paper has been constrained by the editors’ demands. Therefore, this introductory chapter serves to present and develop features which were left out of the articles. These comprise how the research developed, and ideas and new insights that emerged but could not be included in the papers. It further expands the discussion concerning the thesis’ main theme: the relation between the constitutive democratic values, expressed in the national läroplan/curriculum for compulsory school, and its configuration at school level. This chapter also develops theoretical, methodological and analytical concerns in the thesis’ study. The chapter ends with a summary of the four articles and a concluding reflection.
How the research developed

When I commenced my postgraduate studies my intention was quite clear. After years of intercultural pedagogy in practice and theory, my focus began with the multicultural educational setting. Research in the 1990s had demonstrated that, despite cultural pluralism, monocultural approaches and ethnocentric education prevailed. Children with immigrant background were unreflectively categorized as children with special needs (see for instance Lahdenperä, 1997, 1998; Parszyk, 1999; Ronström, Runfors, & Wahlström, 1995; Tesfahuney, 1999). Therefore, my intention was to explore teachers’ conceptions of children’s needs and how these influence their attitudes and teaching in the multicultural classroom. My initial purpose was to grasp the relationship between teachers’ justifications and their pedagogy. Article I was, therefore, an attempt to give a brief overview of how increased cultural diversity had changed educational conditions in Sweden.

Public discussions in society at large have an impact on research. So they did for me. At the end of the 1990s, when I commenced to outline my research issues, cultural diversity in schools was problematized from a new perspective: how can education contribute to create national and cultural coherence in a multicultural society? Curriculum values received a newly awakened interest. Children’s ethical and moral development in general, and the schools’ responsibility in particular, became prominent in the educational political agenda. Numerous policy documents were published by Skolverket (the National Agency of Education), and a number of school development projects were financed with the purpose of supporting implementation of the curriculum’s values. I became involved in one of these projects as a supervisor.

This school project turned out to be more and more interesting as I gained better insight into value-questions and the teachers’ struggle. As a consequence, my research interest moved from diversity to values, and I decided to use this experience and new knowledge in my thesis. My change of research focus was consistent, since intercultural education and constitutive values overlap. The curriculum’s values are, as I see it, a matter of how individuals interact with each other in general and in particular with regard to the ‘Other’. As a starting-point for a further study, article II discusses teachers’ experiences, possibilities and obstacles, in the implementation of the curriculum’s values.

Thus, the study object of this thesis turned out to be the relationship between school practices and the constitutive values explicitly endorsed in the Swedish national curriculum. That is, the

---

1 In that article I refer to results from an earlier classroom study (Norberg, 1998) outside the programme of my doctoral studies.
values the Swedish teachers have to represent and impart. If I entered a class-room, how would these values operate? A school study was undertaken to grasp these values in concrete actions. That study included six school classes and four pre-school groups. Article III demonstrates examples of how these values were promoted, counteracted and negotiated by the pedagogues.

When I analysed my field-notes, certain incidents such as disparaging comments were easily identified as value-laden and contrary to democratic practice. Other values operated more silently. Events took place which were neither dramatic nor explicitly fraught with conflict, yet, I will argue, they were against the curriculum’s intentions. The moral dimension and its presence in all activities appeared more and more visible. This was further supported in relating research. As von Wright (2000) suggests:

\[\text{If we understand teaching as a moral action, the teacher’s moral responsibility includes also the social interaction, and by morality I consider primarily the teacher’s commitment to do the good in a way which embraces both the individual, private, and the common (p. 166).}\]

Article IV draws attention to the invisible moral dimension that extends to the margins of school work.

**New insights**

Collectively, these articles mirror a research process where new knowledge steered the development of the thesis. While the school’s democratic task is invisible in the first article, the curriculum’s normative and ethical dimensions are more and more apparent in the succeeding articles. In this process, the educational setting is revealed as a moral arena.

There were other alterations as well. The use of the concept curriculum in this thesis has to be clarified. The concept läroplan has, in the Swedish context, a concrete signification. It signifies the document which contains educational goals and guidelines (Lundgren, 1979). The key element is ‘plan’; and in this sense the word ‘läroplan’ is used in articles III and IV and further on in this chapter. Elsewhere the word ‘curriculum’ is used to denote the context of implementation of the läroplan.

Further, instead of using the concept ‘fundamental’, I began to prefer the concept ‘constitutive’ when I referred to the läroplan’s values. The concepts are synonymous but using the

---

2 The result from the pre-school groups does not appear in this thesis since editors asked me to shorten the article. I decided to not present these results in a fourth article since it would solely be a replication of the school study.

3 All translations are my own.

4 The concepts ethics and morals are often used as synonyms since they both denotes notions of good and bad, right and wrong. Following Collste (1996) I separate these concepts. Moral signifies praxis while ethics indicates reflections concerning moral praxis. There is an ethical theory and a moral praxis. In this text the läroplan is an ethical document and teaching is a moral activity. For further definitions, see article III and IV.
latter avoids any negative association with fundamentalism. In this respect I was influenced by Strike (1999) who claims that constitutive educational values are characterized by i) a conception of the ends of a good education; and ii) collective realisation because they are difficult to pursue as individuals. Constitutive values are not always inclusive with regard to cultural diversity. Yet, claims Strike, “there are some constitutive values that we can or should share. Democracy might be one” (p. 49).

Deliberative democracy and deliberation were other steering concepts which emerged in the writing process. They proved to be of value in the school project (article II), and in the school study (article III and IV). These papers discuss situations where staff examine events which were problematic from a value perspective. During the project, the teams’ discussions of values moved from discussions that assumed shared values, to a dialogue where events were critically examined from different perspectives. Meanwhile, I found a concept for what they were practicing: deliberation. What the team actually did was in line with the definition of deliberation. That is, they identified questions to which they had to respond, established “grounds for deciding on answers”, and then chose “among the available solutions” (Johnston, 1993, p. 474).

Deliberation has also been highlighted by Skolverket. One of the school’s allocated assignments is to develop democratic competence; that is, to reflect on, to take up a position on and, to act in accordance with the läroplan’s constitutive values. Thus, deliberative democracy also implies communication (Englund, 2000a). If a central issue in school is how to live a worthwhile life, deliberation becomes a necessary complement to pragmatic dialogue (See for instance Coulter, 2002).

Amy Gutmann is one of the many who explore deliberative democracy and the school’s mission to develop deliberation. It is not a single skill or virtue. It requires, for instance, skills of literacy and critical thinking, and understanding and approval of other’s perspectives (Gutmann, 1999). Citizens who reason together in search of jointly understandable decisions are more likely to serve justice than to those who are only interested in discussion for the sake of their private power. Schools have a significant role in developing deliberative skills. “Deliberation, which takes place at a variety of levels, including individual schools, local school districts, and state legislatures, is one way of publicly defending the ends of civic education” (p. 297).

Yet, argues Englund (2000a), deliberation should not be regarded as a universal solution for all problems in school. He considers it as an approach which emphasizes communication as an activity in the classroom. “Making curricular room for these kinds of activities where deliberative capabilities are developed, would be one way to realize a democratic conception for education
implying a communicative rationality” (Englund, 2000b, p. 312). Deliberative communication should not be regarded as a separate activity, merely for teaching democracy. Englund (2003) considers the deliberative perspective a general model for the school’s practice and its (political) culture. The school should increase the scope for deliberation in issues where knowledge and values are intertwined. Deliberation offers guidance about “different ways of handling problems, the search for enhanced reciprocity and respect, knowledge and confrontations such as the multicultural meeting” (p. 70).

**With constitutive values towards equality**

Since its inception, the historical purpose of schooling has been to develop an informed and educated public. Yet, what constitute information, what ‘educated’ means and who has been included in the term ‘public’ has, however, changed. During the last century, the segregating parallel school system with the purpose to foster godly citizens was replaced by a common school with democracy as steering value.

The all-through nine year education for all children was introduced in 1962. It was an important reform since all children were educated together. The political governing of the school increased with the disappearance of other school forms including many private schools. The state’s control translated into, for instance, governmental funds allocated for teacher salaries and special education costs. And further: “The means for the national state to govern the school was indeed the written National Curriculum, with time tables, controlled textbooks, teacher education and inspection, under the National Board of Education” (Nilsson & Andersson, 2001, p. 258).

The successive läroplans for the compulsory school which took form with the modernisation of the school system in the 1960’s aimed to steer the school towards equality (Lundgren, 1999). Four läroplans have steered the inner life of school since 1962: Lgr62, Lgr69, Lgr80 and Lpo94. Yet, despite variations in range, specification and expression, all these läroplans accepted that the school’s fostering task cannot be separated from its knowledge assignment. These are regarded as different elements of the same entity. The läroplans identify the democratic constitutive values which the school should impart. In Lgr62 this is manifested in terms that the school should develop and strengthen:

---

5 The field of deliberative communication has been extensively studied and reported by, among others, Jürgen Habermas. For further reading, see for instance Habermas (1994) Habermas (1996a), Habermas (1996b), Jonsson & Roth (2003), Solhaug (2003).

6 There were still a few private schools, and as a stain in the educational record, Roma children were sometimes excluded from schooling. (See e.g., Hazell, 2002.)
democratic principles concerning tolerance, co-operation and equality of rights between sexes, nations and ethnic groups. To excite respect for truth and right, for the human’s intrinsic value, for the inviolability of human life and thereby for the right to individual integrity is a main task also for the social fostering which the school’s activity should embrace. Fostering for helpfulness towards each other and a willingness to offer one’s capacity to others when possible and suitable is of importance (p.18).

Subsequent läroplans sustained the intrinsic value of humanity, the inviolability of human life, individual integrity, helpfulness and co-operation with people. The concept solidarity has been widened outside the family and friends, to embrace larger societal formations (Lgr69). In Lgr80, the expression ‘helpfulness and willingness to support other people’ is replaced with:

the school shall foster in students the insight that no human may be subjected to oppression and that no one with problem and difficulties may be left to their own devices. Each and everyone has a responsibility to decrease other peoples’ pain, suffering and humiliation (p. 17).

Thus, expressing constitutive values and the school’s fostering role in the läroplan is not a new phenomenon. The latest läroplan has maintained some previous concepts such as the inviolability of human life, equality between women and men, and individual integrity. In the latest version solidarity is expressed with the weak and vulnerable and, later on in the text, solidarity includes active resistance against bullying, persecution, xenophobia and intolerance. In a multicultural society different values should be appreciated as well as one’s own values. The läroplan’s constitutive values were formulated at a time when anti-democratic movements with racist aims had become visible in the public arena.

What is new, however, is that the knowledge task has become more diffuse on account of the increased attention given to value questions. In Lgr80 the school shall actively cultivate and develop knowledge, skills, norms and values. In Lpo94 these terms are reversed: “In a deeper sense education and upbringing involve developing and passing on our cultural heritage: values, traditions, language, knowledge – from one generation to the next” (Lpo94, p. 7) In addition, under the subheading ‘Goals and Guidelines’ norms and values are expressed before the knowledge task of the school.

**Constitutive values vs reality**

This brief overview illustrates the political ambition to create an equal school characterized by democratic values. Yet, the aim of developing such a school has been barely more than a political aspiration, according to Englund (1998). The efforts to transform the läroplan’s goals and actual teaching were understood to be complicated and political sensitive. “Thus”, Englund concluded
as late as 1998, “any real effects on content has not occurred and probably neither on actual school activity” (1998, p. 33).

Englund’s doubts are supported by various research findings. In an educational research overview Tallberg Broman et al. (2002) illustrate how social background, gender and ethnicity still have impact on children’s apprehension and experiences of contemporary schooling. Social class is a determining factor of, for instance, grades and higher studies. Likewise, teachers’ assumptions of boys’ and girls’ “natural” differences have an impact in teaching. Through, for instance, attitudes, methods, and textbooks, the school preserves stereotypical gender roles (see for instance Berggren, 2001; Käller, 1990; von Wright, 1999). And further, children with immigrant background remain ‘the Other’. Tallberg Broman et al. find that “the school’s attitude to minority students is categorized by focusing on differences from a cultural standpoint” (p. 169). Children with non-Swedish background are, in a multicultural school, reshaped according to a monocultural tradition.

Tallberg Broman et al.’s research review demonstrates, then, how the historical class-gender- and ethnic segregating school in many respects are reconstructed. This might be explained through what Bernstein (2000) claims as the school’s unequal distribution of knowledge, images, possibilities and resources, which, in turn, have an impact on rights of participation and inclusion. Such unequal distribution is not based on neutral differences in knowledge, but “on a distribution of knowledge which carries unequal value, power and potential” (p. xxi). Society’s hierarchy of social groups and differential power is likely to be reflected in school. The critical question for the school is how it manages the connection between the external social order, justice and conflict, and the internal hierarchies of knowledge, possibility and value within the school.
Conducting the study
All research begins with a problem or a question which motivates inquiry. The choice of questions, how they are asked and whose voices are heard, depend on the researcher’s starting point. Questions pose notions of what is worth studying, how the researcher locates herself ideologically, and her role encountering the subjects investigated. Moreover, it mirrors certain understandings of how reality in general, and the study object in particular, is constituted. This assumption is not necessarily well-articulated in theoretical and scientific concepts at the beginning of the research. Yet, the researcher does not enter the process as an empty vessel. The researcher is, more or less consciously, self-positioned within a paradigm.

Paradigms represent belief systems which are attached to a particular worldview. A net of epistemological and ontological suppositions or interpretative frameworks, characterizes a paradigm which therefore has a normative or valuative component (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Messick, 1989). Since narratives are accounts couched and framed within a specific paradigm, there is no value-free science, and no study should be entered without seeking to become aware of what paradigm the research represent (Hamilton, 1994). Hence, the researcher’s self-reflection inter-relates with conceptions of the researched phenomenon, and the researcher’s role (Kvale, 1989). Here we find assumptions and values which have an impact on interpretations.

The researcher’s point of view is influenced, among other things, by language, gender, social class, race, ethnicity and sexual disposition (see e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Following Haw (1998), research is a product of an interplay between individual biography, social location, historical time and cultural context. These features reflect the researcher’s assumptions regarding “what there is to be known and what is knowable” (p. 15) as these assumptions stem from the researcher’s understanding and experiences. For these reasons, a brief personal account may help to situate the approach and the findings.

Biography as social location
I entered doctoral studies, and later on the school study, as a white, middle aged, heterosexual, and middleclass woman, born and raised in Sweden. My professional experiences derives from my work as an educator at the department of Education and at the Centre for Principal Development, and, as important for this thesis, my life as a pre-school teacher for eighteen years in multicultural pre-schools.

Working as a pre-school teacher signifies taking care of others’ children. During those years I experienced how different values operate within the pre-school settings from different
perspectives. If I had not been aware of my white middle class ideals and values, and the 'right way of fostering', they became apparent when my values were confronted with parents' attitudes. Some of these attitudes embraced values that, I felt, did not correspond with the pre-school's 'commonsensical' value system.

These differences became more explicit when families from outside Europe entered pre-school. The 'Other' became more visible through different religious and 'non-Western values'. Foreign traditions were, more or less explicitly, considered as morally 'under-developed'. There was a 'We' with 'good' values and competences, and the 'Others' with the opposite. There was an obvious gap between my rhetoric and practice when it came to equally valuing humanity. As my Eurocentric value system was challenged, my interest regarding how values are negotiated in educational settings was awakened.

Equality also considers gender issues. As a feminist, albeit without situating myself in any one feminism, the unequal and different opportunities for boys and girls were obvious in pre-school. Lack of knowledge and consciousness contributed to actions where professionals, like myself, played a part of the unconscious reproduction of stereotype gender-roles. Through literature studies, class-rooms observations, and critical self reflections, my awareness and competence was deepened concerning gender issues within the educational realm.

**Entering the field**

When I entered the school study my pre-assumption was that the school is not solely an institution for the transfer of knowledge. It is also a cultural system where individuals' values, actions and interpretations are understandable. Geertz (1973) defines culture as

> interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described (p. 14).

The culture consists, in this context, of a set of values, rules and symbols which a group of people embrace and preserve (Arnstberg, 1993). Such a group might be people sharing a national identity, people from a particular village, or members of an extended family, all of whom identify themselves as belonging to each other. A culture can also be a group of professionals, such as teachers with their own collective values, rules and symbols that are taken for granted as 'normal'. The school as a cultural system embodies central features in the contemporary society’s values as well as normative notions concerning, for instance, learning, child-development and the good
things of life. Following Ehn’s (1983) cultural analysis of pre-schooling, the school “produces and reproduces fundamental cognitive- and value-systems with a more general validity” (p. 15).

Yet, cultures are never fixed. Within the school, the school staff, parents and children with different gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, interests and so forth, come together in “social situations where [cultural] identity is abandoned, emphasized or defused, changed or defended” (Ehn, 1986, p. 159). Thus, the interpretation, negotiation, and implementation of the individuals’ values, rules and symbols create a dynamic school culture.

The actors in the school, then, position themselves according to cultural, yet flexible, perceptions concerning how things ‘are’. For instance, there are normative conceptions about how men and women ‘are’ and ‘should’ be. Following Lundgren (2001), such conceptions might have a “structuring function in interpersonal relations and interactions, because they readily express normative interpretations” (p. 47). How things ‘are’ might be explained, as Magnusson (2003) suggests, by a close cognitive connection between what is considered as frequent or ‘natural’, and what is considered as ‘right’. Yet, argues Magnusson “It is interesting that this kind of ‘nature’-argument is most common when gender differences are discussed” (p. 134). Variations related to class differences, for instance, are not to the same extent explained by naturalness.

Consequently, the school’s culture is significant since it has bearing on teachers’ interpretations and the realization of their task. Teachers’ actions are influenced by norms, expectations, individual knowledge and experience which, in turn, have an impact on their way of interacting with colleagues and children. Teachers’ actions also depend on the context, the school culture, rather than merely on their professional out-look or ideology (Hargreaves, 1994).

The study’s theoretical orientations
Such standpoint mentioned above can be explained in social constructivist and interactionist terms. Society consists of individuals with selves, with a past and a future, to which they refer when they deal with phenomena in their context. People are constructive and relate to their surrounding world as well as attribute meaning to their relationships. The function of phenomena is never intrinsic but is assigned externally from observers and users, that is, observers relativise (Searle, 1995). The surrounding world becomes objectified as meaning is conferred on objects, people, and events rather than that they possess their own meaning. The definition of, for instance, a proper meal, what, when and how it is eaten, might vary when it is defined by a teacher or by a student. It can be a break for lunch, an annoying intrusion or a chance to do some
low-key business (Bogdan & Biklen Knopp, 1998). Thus, eating lunch has a symbolic meaning beyond its survival significance.

An object gets its meaning by individuals’ interaction where language is of significance. “The feature of language essential for the constitution of institutional facts is the existence of symbolic devices, such as words, that by convention mean or represent or symbolize something beyond themselves” (Searle, 1995, p. 60). When we agree on and believe in the different characteristics for different objects, social facts are created (Barlebo Wenneberg, 2001). Yet, the same phenomenon can have different meaning for different people or for the same individual but at different times. Linguistic tools, such as terms, concepts and categories are, as Lahdenperä (2000) suggests, culturally bound and defined in a specific cultural context where meaning is created and given: “Culture is a part of our social world and represents the context for our conversations, of which we are products” (p. 204). The world is lived out through conversation.

Through interaction with others, people interpret phenomena and construct meaning. People who regularly interact, e.g. in class-rooms and schools, share experiences and problems and thereby often develop common definitions (Bogdan & Biklen Knopp, 1998). Some shared definitions indicate ‘truths’, others are subject to collective negotiation and, perhaps, reconciliation. Rules, regulations, norms and belief systems are important in understanding conduct but only if people take them into account. It is not rules, regulations and norms in themselves that are of importance. What is significant is how these rules and norms are defined and used in specific situations. A school might have rules, schedules, curriculum, organizational charts but, claim Bogdan and Biklen Knopp, “people act, however, not according to what the school is supposed to be or what administrators say it is, but, rather, according to how they see it” (p. 37) The way school actors define school and its components shapes their actions, although other structures may set mediating limits and costs.

The study’s purpose
Swedish schooling operates in a context where, during the last part of the twentieth century, the authority and responsibility for governing the school have been transferred from the central administration to municipalities and local schools. This is a transformation which, according to Nilsson and Andersson (2001), can be described as “decentralization of power and control – a process that comprises change in both policy and practice” (p. 260). One significant omission in policy, which has contributed to change of practice, is the läroplan’s lack of specific formulations. Its goals and guidelines are to be interpreted and realized at local level. This presupposes that teachers share the common value system on which these goals are based. Yet, argue Lindensjö and
Lundgren (2000), the läroplan’s goals are not solely interpreted according to a set of basic political values. Rather, acquired experiences and knowledge also steer teachers’ interpretations. As Goodlad (1979a) argues: the curriculum’s educational intentions are “in the eye of the beholder.” (p. 30), since there are many goals and guidelines perceived simultaneously by different individuals and groups. Learners, as well as teachers and researchers, will “respond to something called a curriculum, a curriculum they will perceive quite differently from the way it was perceived by all those who had something to do with producing or developing it” (p.20). Or, as Cornbleth (2000) argues:

Curriculum policy is continually made, remade, and unmade both in official chambers and school classrooms .... curriculum policy-making illustrates how the policies reflect the broader politics.... Those politics and policies, however, do not map directly onto classroom curriculum practice. Instead they are transformed, ignored, or actively undermined (p. 222).

Thus, the means and goals for teachers’ activities are not necessarily autonomous. The school culture, together with the teachers’ educational experience and interpretation of their task, prescribes and supplies the class-room’s meaning. What happens in class-rooms also depends on individuals, their relationships and hierarchy, their predicament and, as Gudmundsdóttir (2001) adds: “individual factors such as idiosyncratic interpretations” (p. 228).

In the light of these circumstances, the purpose of this thesis study (presented in article III and IV), was to examine the relation between the läroplan and the enacted curriculum. My interest concerned the läroplan’s stipulating constitutive values, formulated at central level and their configuration on local level, that is, in the classroom. The research’s focus moved from the ought-to-be-perspective to a practice perspective, what is, i.e. to class-room level. That is, the site where the läroplan’s constitutive values are supposed to guide actions. In short, the purpose was to unpack, what Goodlad et al. (1979) identify as, the ‘curriculum of the mind’: how and what meanings the teachers construct around value-laden events and how the läroplan’s values are perceived, negotiated and justified in practice.

Method

Suitable methods to achieve knowledge depend on the research question and on the context. The assumption, described above, that people act as interpreting, defining, symbolic individuals has consequences for research methodology. The meaning of events and the interactions can be

---

7 As these articles demonstrate, my focus is on the läroplan for the compulsory school, pre-school class and after-school centre (Lpo94). The läroplan for the non-compulsory school system, Lp94, and the läroplan for preschool, Lp98, are excluded from this thesis. Yet, all Swedish contemporary läroplans express the same constitutive values.
understood by entering the classroom as participant observer. This method has, compared with more structured methods, “the flexibility to yield insight into new realities or new ways of looking at old realities” (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. 87), since it is not bound by predetermined categories of measurement or response.

I spent around 30 hours in six classrooms. Since the teachers had other visitors such as parents and candidate teachers, I was concerned that my interference would cause as little disturbance as possible. Therefore, the teachers decided when it was most suitable for me to visit. My visits varied between one and a half to five hours. My intention was not to quantify and generalize teachers’ actions. Rather, it was to explore value-laden situations. The field notes embrace value-laden incidents in lessons with different contents and methods (e.g., physical education, mathematics or reading). Sometimes, the teacher was an instructor, at other times a coach, guide or supervisor.

Six working teams, with 3-4 teachers, male and female in each team, participated in the study published in article III. My focus was on the teachers’ style. Following Hansen (1993), I use the term ‘style’ to include gestures, body movements, facial expressions, tone of voice as well as what was actually said. These personal attributes may be unconscious for the teacher. Teachers, like other professionals, are not always aware of their habitual ways of acting. Yet, these actions are not unimportant. I did not, however, seek to find how the teacher’s style had a causal impact on children’s moral development. Instead, my interest was to find events which could be identified as value-related. What was going on in the room? What were the teacher’s pedagogic priorities?

As a former pre-school teacher I did not have to spend time becoming acquainted with the class-room and its codes. Neither was the interplay with the children problematic. They were used to visitors, and I was accustomed to interact with children. I assisted them if necessary, answering their questions and so forth, with a conscious intention to avoid uncomfortable situations with a stranger in the classroom.

While sitting taking notes, I wrote everything I could see and hear. I also marked the child’s gender and ethnicity since these categories were important for the analysis. Despite the experience of practicing a kind of split-vision there must have been events, words, and glances which I could not perceive. Likewise, although my effort was to grasp as much as possible, I had,

---

8 There is an error in article III, p. 3. When editing that text, i.e., taking away the results from the observations in the four pre-school groups, the amount of observation hours should be read around 30 instead of 50 hours.
9 If the child was from another country I made up a corresponding name e.g., Mohammed (Iran). This study does not, however, take social class into account, even though it may be an important category.
more or less consciously, to choose between events to write down, and those to discard. Or, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) claim:

There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience (p. 12).

Research is characterised by multi-methods. Wolcott (1992) chooses the terms experiencing, enquiring and examining, to describe qualitative methods, and argues that these terms illustrate what is being done. Therefore, beside observation, group interviews were relevant to my study as I wanted to discuss my findings with the teachers.¹⁰ Eisenhart and Howe (1992) argue that to increase internal validity, research must use methods which coincide with how the researched group describe and understand their experiences. Therefore, my interest was whether there were any differences between my interpretation as an outsider, and their understanding as teachers. My transcribed field-notes were returned to the teachers with an invitation to look for evidence of constitutive values in practice. Thereafter I met them in teams, and our discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed.

These follow-up meetings served three functions: epistemological, methodological and ethical. First, they enabled me to assess the credibility of my record. Did my interpretations correspond with those of the teachers (See also Larsson, 1994; Merriam, 1994) ? We agreed that we had been at the same place at the same time and that the described events had occurred.

Secondly, these discussions generated further reflections among the teachers, a process of “dialogical data generation” (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Lenz Taguchi, 2000). Teachers’ reflections and justifications were important and helped me to understand their underlying thinking, and to deepen my understanding of their ethical and moral standpoints and actions.

Thirdly, the involvement of the teachers was a matter of research ethics. The teachers were not simply passive study objects, but active participants in creating new knowledge about their practice. This was a study with the teachers, not on them. Carspecken and Apple suggest: “An interview or a facilitated group discussion creates a new normative context for the subject through which slightly new identities may be claimed and new norms referenced” (p. 531). We were together constructing new knowledge through discussing the collected data.

¹⁰ Of course I could have interviewed some of the teachers individually before the group discussion. Such proceeding might have gained other insights. My reason to choose group interview was pragmatic. These team discussions took between one and a half to two hours of the teachers already full time-table.
Analysis

My purpose was to analyze how the constitutive values were realized in the classroom. That is, I used my understanding and interpretation of the läroplan’s constitutive values as an analytic probe. My first reading was, then, an attempt to find events which I could relate to these values. Events were listed under different headings such as democracy, equality, and equal value. Teachers’ responses concerning children’s proposals were transferred to the category ‘democracy’, and their reaction towards boys and girls was located under the headline ‘gender’.

After several readings of the field-notes, patterns emerged. Events with conflicts were easy to discover and relate to value categories. Yet, there were not many incidents of that character. Rather, there were events which, silently, were not in accordance with the stipulated values. Within those episodes, different values could operate simultaneously. The most significant pattern, however, was how gender saturated the data. Nevertheless, I was also well aware that I could not see multiple regimes so easily from an ethnic perspective. This could mean that no such regime existed or merely that I could not identify them as white majority member of the society. The moral dimension in teaching in general, and the reproduction of stereotype gender roles in particular appeared and made me search for parallel research around these topics.

A further purpose was to analyze how the läroplan’s values were perceived, negotiated and justified in practice. As I analyzed the transcribed interviews, my data generated new insights and understandings of teachers’ rationales which had to be explored, which, in turn, led me back to my data. For instance, I found Oser’s (1992) five types of decision-making to resolve moral problems useful for clarifying and understanding teachers’ actions. Thus, the research process was characterized by constantly moving backwards and forwards, from data to literature and back to data again. It was an inspirational, yet often a demanding process.

The events in the field-notes became fixed when they were typed up and categorized. The real individuals and their actions disappeared and came forward as symbols infused with meanings. As Gudmundsdóttir (2001) suggests:

> the selected episodes (already infused with meaning) become the artifacts with which the narrator (or researcher) creates a narrative or story that will capture what the narrator experienced in such a way that the reader will gain a new insight and a new understanding of the larger issue behind the particular series of incidents (p. 231).

Thus, despite the fact that my goal was to understand the teachers’ own point of view, the phrase ‘their point of view’ presents a problem. It may not represent the way they think of themselves. On the contrary, it may represent my approach on their work and therefore ‘point of view’ is a research construct (Bogdan & Biklen Knopp, 1998). Or, as Altheide and Johnson (1998) argue
“All knowledge and claims to be knowledge are reflexive of the process, assumptions, location, history and context of knowing and the knower” (p. 288).

The study does not rely on theories of morality and moral language. Like Sanger (2001) I wanted to grasp the teachers’ voices, the connection between their practice and beliefs. The moral dimensions of their teaching are either assumed or constructed after our conversations and, following Sanger, “without their beliefs on what morality is about or how their teaching relates to their beliefs about what is moral” (p. 685). The analysis of both the field-notes and the team discussion is mine, influenced by my interpretations, pre-assumptions and the knowledge acquired during the research process.
Summary of the articles

I   Intercultural education and teacher education in Sweden
Swedish pre-schools and schools have always been multicultural from different perspectives, such as gender, class and ethnicity. Increasing immigration from outside Europe has, however, sharply raised the multicultural issue in the pedagogical context. New traditions, languages and religions have challenged the presumption of homogeneity and called for educational changes. Despite this cultural pluralism, monocultural and Eurocentric attitudes saturate educational norms and values. Pedagogical problems and multiculturalism are, then, defined in terms of immigration.

Monocultural education operates in schools with diverse justifications. The normality discourse, with being Swedish as ‘normal’, masks differences that hamper the children’s presumed wish to ‘melt into the group’. Moreover, teachers’ pragmatic values steer the preservation of a homogeneous culture as a strategy for survival in a complex and hectic classroom. Likewise, many teachers’ individual values, with their origin in the majority culture, influence presuppositions of children’s needs. There is, then, a more or less conscious unexpressed goal of inclusion by assimilation into the dominant culture. One explanation for this tendency might be the monocultural approach which has prevailed in the teacher training institutions.

Monocultural education has to be replaced by intercultural education, i.e., a different pedagogical content, method and organization which defines ‘culture’ in its broad meaning including class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual identity and so forth. Intercultural education originates from the students’ cultures and languages rather than from Swedish presumptions. Issues are highlighted, therefore, from different perspectives.

Some rationales for monocultural attitudes are to be found within teacher education programmes. Intercultural issues compete with other perspectives and issues and are further dependent on teacher educators’ skills and enthusiasm. Moreover, if the school of education is situated in a community with many immigrants, the intercultural perspective is more visible and regarded as more significant.

Intercultural education is of importance irrespective of immigrant representation. In school, different values come together. Educational norms and values meet families’ experiences and perceptions of teaching and fostering. An education of all citizens, however defined, has to balance between contributing to a certain cultural consensus, the common and the shared, and an increased ability to live with cultural diversity. If an intercultural approach is anchored within the
teachers and educators themselves, the multicultural educational realm has the possibility of becoming democratic and inclusive.

II The Constitutive Values of Swedish Schooling: a challenge to the inner life of schools

Societal changes have always had consequences for education. Immigration, globalization and transnational communication have had impact on cultural politics and social diversity which, in turn, influence schooling. Educational values which intend to strengthen national identities are no longer evident since such an identity is complex in diverse and cultural pluralistic societies. Yet, despite the lack of an obvious national identity within nations, schooling is still a tool for national construction and reconstruction. The problem is, however, to identify and transfer social values in a multicultural society without being exclusive, and, further, for the teachers to interpret, contextualize and implement these values into educational practice. This article examines these aspects of curriculum and the national question. It illustrates teachers’ experiences from an action research school project which aimed to put the national curriculum’s constitutive values into practice in a multicultural school.

Mill school consists of pre-school groups and school groups, governed by ten working teams. Each team formulated an issue, raised from their daily practice, to explore and develop in coherence with the curriculum’s promoted values. Through reflective journals, structured observations, video-recording, and text studies, the teachers examined and analyzed their practice. The analysis formed the basis for deliberation; i.e. discussions and changes in their practice.

The outcomes from the project’s first two years were various. The teachers moved from abstract to concrete discussions of the constitutive values, i.e., from rhetoric in general terms to critical examining how these values are played out in action. There was also a transition from focusing on children’s conduct to studying themselves and colleagues in practice. These observations generated new knowledge of how teachers’ performance works in accordance with or against the stipulated values, and, as important, how individual values have an impact on professional life. In general, actions were done to improve a learning environment, focusing for instance on respect, tolerance and equality. The majority of the teams managed to intertwine the constitutive values with their daily work while those who found shortage of time for the project were caught within the limitations of technical rationality.

An earlier version of this article was presented at the European Conference on Educational Research in Edinburgh, September 2000.
The curricula’s constitutive values are abstract. They have to be interpreted and concretized in local contexts. There is a need to move beyond technical rationality to deliberative communication where questions like What?, How?, and Why? are raised. In the multicultural educational realm, if teachers have been taught to see uniformness, there is a need to examine practice from outside the dominating culture and challenge prevailing norms, values and methods. The teachers’ interpretations and realization of the curricula’s values have to be further examined. What is central in the curriculum is also central in the national question.

III Constitutive Values and Daily Practice in a Swedish School

Schooling is, and has always been, a moral practice. It is about the regulation of human interaction, according to prevailing norms and regulations. In this context, school participants come together with individual values and perceptions which have to be negotiated in educational practice.

The school’s fostering mission is not a new phenomenon. What is new, however, is the last decade’s increasing emphasis on the Swedish national läroplan’s constitutive values. Discussions of pedagogic values associated with teaching and learning came to the forefront in Sweden during the 1990s. The foundation of the läroplan comprises the ethical values and moral tasks of the school. The school’s caring mission is given priority over its knowledge task. The läroplan provides thereby an ethical framework which should be negotiated by all educational actors.

This article is about ethical beliefs and moral practices in a Swedish school. It is based on a school study which investigated the teachers and children’s interaction around the constitutive values of the national läroplan. The episodes, presented together with teachers’ comments, provide a window on the complexity of schooling.

The staff at Green school had the ambition to realize the national läroplan’s values in practice. The observations demonstrate how the planned and structured daily practice was in coherence with promoted values. When it came to unplanned situations, however, there were episodes which not only counteracted these values, they were also invisible to the teachers.

The episodes illustrate how teachers experienced problems in their daily practices that arise from the value dimensions - personal, local and national - that suffuse schools as workplaces. Individual beliefs and the hectic moment-by-moment practice steered teachers’ actions. Likewise, avoiding disorder was a further example of how teachers’ practices clashes with the constitutive

---

12 An earlier version of this article was presented at the 7th Annual Values & Educational Leadership Conference in Toronto, October 2002. It was also presented at Green School in November 2002.
values. But, throughout the study, these practices also created multiple regimes from a gender perspective. Different attitudes and notions were applied to boys and girls.

Despite the Green school teachers’ conscious struggle to apply constitutive values in daily practice, the episodes demonstrate the existence of values that counteract the teachers’ mission. Contrary practice, attitudes and moral actions were normalised and difficult to identify as value-laden. When these episodes were problematised through team members taking different positions, the unreflective norms of these actions were revealed and, in some groups, contributed to proposals for further changes.

This article highlights difficulties associated with the teacher’s task of translating ethical beliefs, formulated at the central level, into moral practices at the local level. If citizenship education is a political priority in Sweden, clarification of values and, above all, moral practices also become an important educational priority. There has to be space for deliberation within Swedish teacher education and schools since the läroplan is a political framework rather than a pedagogic or didactic prescription. Further, there is a need for enhanced knowledge and awareness among teachers of how social, educational, and personal values have an impact on the work of schools. Interpreting, internalising and applying democratic values is a never-ending process. How these values can be realised in practice has to be constantly reviewed. If such problematic episodes can be anticipated, democratic values are more easily realised.

IV Morality at the Margins – a silent dimension of teaching and learning

Teaching is a moral endeavour. It transmits moral messages, all based on values and expectations. In school practice, there are innumerable events which carry normative messages. Some are easy to identify, as when a teacher explicitly intervenes to restore moral order. Other actions transfer values which operate more silently since they are taken for granted and normalised. Being a skilful teacher presumes the competence to judge the consequences of actions from a moral perspective.

Swedish teachers’ moral responsibility is not a new assignment. For more than a century, their obligations have also included fostering for citizenship. The emphasis on religious values has, however, altered in favour of democratic values. In the prevailing läroplan the constitutive values are presented before the knowledge task. The normative role of schooling is thereby symbolically strengthened.

---

13 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 8th Annual Values and Educational Leadership Conference, State College, US, October 2003.
The Swedish läroplan operate in a decentralised school system. Its constitutive values which infuse goals and guidelines should be interpreted and implemented at local level, among others, by the teachers. Skolverket (The National Agency of Education) advances deliberation as an approach for developing democratic competence within children; that is, fostering dialogue where different points of view are exchanged with a collective desire to come to a solution. Deliberation is a challenge for teachers in a context where people believe in different social conventions. Other obstacles for deliberation are time, and, as important, a fear of different values which challenge a sense of collegial consensus.

This article builds on a field study which investigated the relationship between school practice and the democratic values endorsed in the Swedish national läroplan. A lunch-time episode illustrates the discrepancy between the national läroplan’s ethical values, and their realisation in practice. At a first glance, the episodes concerns a pragmatic dilemma, how to organize lunch. Superficially, this goal was fulfilled. Yet, I argue that the event also illustrates a moral dilemma and a discrepancy between the läroplan’s ethical values and guidelines and their realisation at local level. Pragmatic and individual values saturated the teacher’s actions in the here-and-now practice. These underlying values, however, generated moral messages concerning participation, equal opportunities, responsibility and respect, that came to conflict with the läroplan’s moral mission.

Thus, this short episode illustrates how values operate throughout the learning environment. It further demonstrates the relevance of examining individual, taken-for-granted actions and social conventions from a distance and consider their coherence with the läroplan’s promoted values. The episode also point out the importance of analysing the relationship between democratic acts and gender in classroom setting. Acquisition of these capabilities supports and develops good teaching and, as importance, it discloses and attends to moral actions. In other words, deliberation could make it possible to uncover the hidden values which operate in school.
Concluding reflections

This thesis' main focus is the national läroplan’s constitutive values, and the enacted curriculum. It problematises the teachers’ struggle, successes and failures, in this task. In a time when the school in general, and teachers in particular are criticised in the media, my aspiration is that these findings will not be interpreted as an additional contribution to ‘blame the teacher’ critique. Rather, my intention is that these events might serve as a starting point for discussions at the implementation level as well as at central level where conditions for the inner life of school is stipulated.

I do not claim that the study’s findings are general. It is too small for such statement. Yet, I would argue that the participating teachers are not unique. Evaluations demonstrate that the läroplan in general and the constitutive values in particular, do not have the steering function in school as intended. Further, it is a thorny mission to accomplish an equal school in an unequal society. Nonetheless, it cannot be unreasonable to hope for an enhanced competence among pedagogues concerning the correspondence between societal values, the hierarchy of social groups (class, gender and ethnicity), individual values, the läroplan’s values, and the teacher’s assignment.

These are significant issues in teacher education and in-service training. Not as a course in a few credits or as a one-day topic, but as a saturating theme throughout the teacher education program and the school’s daily work. The läroplan’s values have to be taken into account as well as individual attitudes, prejudices and taken-for-granted notions have to be clarified, confronted, defended or abandoned. In other words, the moral obligation in school has to be emphasised. How this is conducted within teacher education and school is an issue which has to be further explored.

Deliberative democracy is a recurrent theme in the thesis. I do not claim that problems in school always could be solved through deliberation. Such a viewpoint is naïve. There are situations which are best ignored, or where the teacher has to act unitarily as an authority. It is not unreasonable, however, to practice professional moral principles when someone’s (child or adult) human dignity is at stake, or when someone is insulted, people act disrespectfully, without care or humanitarian sense.

In addition, families have to be invited to discussions about the school’s fostering mission. Not only from a top-down perspective, i.e., a matter of information of the läroplan’s values, but as a serious discussion concerning how these values could be interpreted from different perspectives, and realised in a democratic practice. A crucial question has to be explored in the creation of a common national value system. Whose definition of Swedish applies?
Epilogue

As I finished writing this chapter, the Foreign Minister’s murderer has been found guilty but not sentenced. The focus on democratic values has faded in the press but the humanitarian issue still remain on the educational agenda.
References


